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EMERSON AS A POET.

THE death of the greatest of American men of letters—a man who was at once an elemental thinker and an elemental power—immediately drew forth such a series of tributes to his genius and character, from such a wide variety of thoughtful minds, that it is difficult at this date to say anything of him which has not been said before. But perhaps, in surveying him as a poet, some additional reasons may be given in proof that he was original in the sense in which the word is applied to the recognized masters of song.

In estimating the relative worth and rank of a poet, we are bound to consider not merely his possession of “the vision and the faculty divine,” but the penetration and extent of his vision and the originality of his faculty. Did his spiritual insight go deeper than that of other poets of his age and generation? Did he advance beyond the recognized frontier of the ideal world in his time, and add a new province to it? Were his verses imitations or revelations? Did his poetic faculty work on old materials, adding only an individual flavor to new combinations of the old, or did he create or spiritually discern new materials for poetic treatment? In the case of Emerson, these questions can be answered only by a survey of what had been done by the great poets of the century, when (to use General Sheridan’s significant phrase) he “took the affair in hand.”

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Everybody in the least acquainted with the history of the literature of Great Britain knows that, during the later years of the last century, an insurrection broke out against the tyranny of the school of Dryden and Pope, as exercised by their degenerate successors. This revolt was called "a going back to nature"; and Burns and Cowper, each from a widely different point of view, exemplified it in fresh and original poems. One of Burns's songs, or one of Cowper's minute descriptions of natural objects, when placed by the side of the conventional verse, or rather the rhymed prose, of the time, made the latter appear thin in substance, meager in meaning, and entirely destitute of any poetic quality whatever. There was no possibility of a new Dryden or Pope coming forth to vindicate the worth of the old poetic method; that method was then represented in the vapid translations of Hoole and the plaintive imbecilities of Hayley; and after Burns had sung and Cowper had described, there could be no revival of the poetry of nature which did not deny the validity of the conventional canons and standards of "taste" which such critics as Dr. Johnson had announced. Whatever may have been the merits of the wits and poets of the Age of Queen Anne, it must be confessed that the rebellion against their authority ended in producing a new era in English poetry, comparable only to that great outburst of poetic inspiration which occurred in what is called the Age of Elizabeth.

The man who stands in literary history as the head and heart of this revolution was William Wordsworth. He it was who first, among the poets of his day, aimed not only to describe but to interpret Nature. By constant communion with her forms and varying aspects he came at last to see that she was spiritually *alive*—that his own soul was not only touched and inspired by intently viewing her external shows and appearances, but that the soul animating Nature was akin to his own; and that if

"The discerning intellect of man
Were wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion,"

the fantastic dreams of the old mythological poets would be more than realized—would, indeed, be

"A simple produce of the common day."

And then, anticipating this marriage of the mind which pervades the universe of matter with the mind of man, he professes to write in advance its mystic epithalamium:

"I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal hour
Of this great consummation; and by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures."

It is needless to state how long Wordsworth worked, year after year, in many forms of poetic expression, to inculcate his poetic creed to an unresponsive and unsympathetic public. The creed itself only became popular when it was taken up by Byron; and then the splendor and passion of Byron's rhetoric made it accepted, though it did not necessarily make it understood. Most of the eminent poets of the century more or less felt the influence of Wordsworth's fundamental conception of nature as spiritually alive; in poem after poem they reproduced it, modified, of course, by their own individuality and way of looking at nature and man; but in no literary history of the nineteenth century has Wordsworth's priority in the matter been fully recognized. Now, nothing is more capable of demonstration than the fact that, in the summer of 1798, Wordsworth visited the ruins of Tintern Abbey, and that in a few days he wrote the poem under that name which introduced into English poetry an element which it never had before, and has never parted with since. Chronologically, it precedes everything in the same strain written by Byron, Shelley, or any other poet of the time; and, in addition to this, the circumstances under which it was written plainly indicate that its thoughts and sentiments had long been familiar to his experience, and had, indeed, been domesticated in his soul before he poured them forth in those memorable lines. In his note to the poem he simply says:

"Tintern Abbey, July, 1798. No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days with my sister. Not a line of it was altered and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol."

Indeed, he only finished it in time to be printed in that volume of "Lyrical Ballads," the conjoint production of Coleridge and himself, which at once marked an era in English literature, and gave the proprietor of the copyright good cause for moaning. Cottle, the publisher, tells us that "the sale was so low, and the severity of most of the reviews so great, that its progress to

oblivion seemed to be certain." He printed five hundred copies of a volume that contained "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere" and "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey,"—not to mention "We are Seven," and other pieces of Wordsworth now universally popular,—and was glad to get rid of them as best he could. Afterward, in selling out his stock to the Longmans, he found the copyright of the "Lyrical Ballads" was valued at *nil*; and he had therefore the pleasure of returning it to the authors, as a present which might be good for something to them, though it had proved worse than good for nothing to him.

From this inauspicious beginning the grand poetic revolution of the nineteenth century tottered and stumbled on for a number of years, until Byron popularized it. The "Lyrical Ballads" indicated the two extremes of Wordsworth's genius. In "We are Seven," he showed that a simplicity of style bordering very nearly on the literal sing-song of a nursery-rhyme might, if it had genuine feeling back of it, touch and unseal fountains of emotion in the universal human heart; that a poet can be thoroughly child-like, abounding in the joyous consciousness of life, without degenerating into childishness, which is the pathetic sign of the senility of that second childhood which is the dreadful reverse of the first; and that the refusal of the guileless child to admit the idea of death into her mind shows that the glad perception of the possession of life is a prophecy of its indefinite continuance. It is curious that this little poem—the one by which Wordsworth is universally known, which is in all school-books, and which has been committed to memory by thousands ignorant of his other works—would never have been printed had the advice of a near and dear friend of the author been taken. This friend found little fault with other pieces contained in the volume; but he implored Wordsworth not to make himself "everlastingly ridiculous" by including "We are Seven" in the collection. Men of original genius, like Wordsworth and Emerson, are easily indifferent to the invectives or gibes of their pronounced enemies. The real danger comes from professed friends, who beg them, from the best of motives, to distrust their genius whenever its audacities give too violent a shock to accredited notions of "taste."

If "We are Seven" represents the simplest expression of Wordsworth's genius, the lines on Tintern Abbey represent its loftiest. Artistically it is almost perfect. Though written in

blank verse, the poem has such a deep, impassioned undertone of melody, and its transitions from one mental mood to another are so finely harmonized, that Wordsworth was partly justified in his hope that it might be called an "ode." After describing his youthful delight in the forms and colors of nature, when they needed no interest "unborrowed of the eye," but were to him "as an appetite" and "haunted him like a passion," he goes on to state the compensations which, in after years, thought and imagination supplied for the departure of youthful impulse and ecstasy.

"That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A Presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

In this passage we have the spiritual side of Wordsworth. He had fairly earned the right to have this interior life and meaning of nature revealed to him, because from his pure youth to his pure manhood he had been her worshiper. She yielded to him the secret of some of her spiritual laws as she yielded to Newton, one after the other, her physical laws. Intense devotion to her was the condition on which she distributed her favors, giving impartially to seer or scientist the wages due to his love and work. The victories of the scientist, however, are palpable. His discoveries can be demonstrated, so that to refuse belief in them is a confession of ignorance and weakness of understanding. On the contrary, the discoveries of the poet depend for their reception and verification on the mental and moral condition and

experience of his readers. He has no mathematical tests by which to convict his unsympathetic critics of stupidity or lack of spiritual perception. Accordingly, just in proportion as he departs from mechanical rules in announcing the results of his vital inspiration, his very superiority to his critics furnishes the grounds for his condemnation.

Wordsworth was, during the largest portion of his life, the victim of hostile criticism. It is commonly taken for granted, even at the present day, that this criticism was provoked and justified by his own faults and absurdities in carrying his revolt against the current poetic diction of the last century to a ridiculous excess. Jeffrey, it is persistently said, only exposed and held up to scorn the poet's puerilities, commonplaces, and obvious violations of good taste—that is, the literary sins which Wordsworth committed through his passion for “the natural” in poetic expression. The fact is that the “*Edinburgh Review*,” in its long fight with Wordsworth, objected not so much to “the natural” as to the supernatural element in his poems. While happily ridiculing some examples of the bald realism of the poet in describing his rustic heroes and heroines, it admitted that he was a wonderfully accurate observer of external nature, and sympathized deeply with the primal affections of the human heart. Its contempt was specially reserved for the poet's spiritual philosophy of nature, which it called “stuff”; year after year it continued to quote those passages in his poems which are now considered to prove his originality and excellence, as evidences of his imbecility of thought. Indeed, Jeffrey was afflicted with a kind of mental color-blindness in his criticism of Wordsworth. He denied the existence of what he was disqualified to see; and his dogmatism of judgment was in exact proportion to his lack of perception. The poet himself once declared, with unusual bitterness, that Jeffrey, as a lawyer, had “taken a perpetual retainer from his own incapacity to plead against my claims to public approbation.”

Probably the subtilty and depth of Wordsworth's insight into nature is even now unappreciated by a large class of highly cultivated men of the world. He tells us, in one of his prefaces, that the secret of the loftiest poetry is hidden from confirmed worldlings, though they may themselves be competent to write brilliant and telling verses, and pass in popular estimation for poets.

It might be supposed that a man like Macaulay, with his enormous range of reading, his intimate acquaintance with many literatures, and his intercourse with the most scholarly society in Great Britain, would be able to know, as late as 1850, the real position which Wordsworth occupied in the history of English poetry; yet, in July of that year, he notes in his diary that he has read "The Prelude," and his opinion of it is this: "The story is the old story. There are the old raptures about mountains and cataracts; the old flimsy philosophy about the effect of scenery on the mind; the old crazy, mystical metaphysics; the endless wildernesses of dull and prosaic twaddle; and here and there fine descriptions and energetic declarations interspersed." It will be seen that, in this judgment, Macaulay reëchoes Jeffrey's scorn of what is essential to an intelligent understanding of the poet. And to crown all, the person selected to write the biography of Wordsworth, his own nephew,—*"Christopher Wordsworth, D. D., Canon of Westminster,"* as he calls himself on the title-page of his two dull octavos,—is very careful to guard his illustrious uncle from any reputation he might gain as a poet at the expense of casting doubt on his conventional orthodoxy of creed. He is as blind as a bat and deaf as an adder to the revelations which Wordsworth derived through the sight and hearing of his soul. When the biographer comes to the lines on Tintern Abbey, we naturally expect he will welcome it as the poem which inaugurated a new era in English poetry; but he does nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he thinks that "the reflecting reader" may "be of opinion that a worshipper of nature is in danger of divinizing the creation and of dishonoring the Creator, and that, therefore, some portions of this poem might be perverted to serve the purposes of a popular and pantheistic philosophy." When "the reflecting reader" conceives of this "danger" to the Christian religion, whither is he to fly for consolation? Why, to the "Evening Voluntaries" of the same poet. In these he will learn that Wordsworth had no idea of "dishonoring the Creator" in announcing that he might be spiritually discerned in the material universe he had created.

These examples of the inapprehension and misconception of Wordsworth's genius, by persons whose culture and position place them above the ordinary mass of readers, double the difficulty of showing in what respect Emerson advanced beyond Wordsworth, and beyond all of Wordsworth's successors, in the

spiritual interpretation of nature. It must be taken for granted that Wordsworth's experience was the result and record of genuine insight, and that it cannot be curtly dismissed as "crazy, mystical metaphysics," before Emerson can even obtain a hearing; for he undoubtedly was more crazy and mystical than Wordsworth dared to be, while independently following in the path which Wordsworth had marked out.

It was a happy thought of a Boston newspaper editor to reprint Emerson's poem of "Good-bye, proud World! I'm going Home," when his death was announced. The verses were written when the poet was a teacher in a Boston school, and his "Sylvan Home" was a boarding-house in Roxbury, only two or three miles distant, but at that time a rustic paradise of woods, rocks, and hills. In these lines he made his first poetic declaration of intellectual and moral independence. Most of the hours of the day he spent in teaching, by the accredited methods, English, Latin, elocution, and rhetoric to youths and maidens; and the duty was evidently a drudgery; for when, in the afternoons, he escaped to the country, he found many a secret nook, bearing no print of "vulgar feet, and sacred to thought and God," where he might indulge to the utmost his communion with nature; and then burst forth his exulting joy in his deliverance from tasks which limited the free expression of his individual genius:

"Oh, when I am safe in my sylvan home,
I tread on the pride of Greece and Rome;
And when I am stretched beneath the pines,
Where the evening star so holy shines,
I laugh at the lore and pride of man,
At the sophist schools, and the learned clan;
For what are they all, in their high conceit,
When man in the bush with God may meet?"

It is unfortunate that this poem should be generally considered as the product of his maturer years, when he escaped from Boston to his chosen home in Concord. The verses are those of a young college graduate, supporting himself by teaching school during the period he is studying to prepare himself for a profession. As the descendant of a long line of "godly ministers," Emerson was naturally drawn to the pulpit rather than to the dissecting-room or the bar; and he began his professional career as a Unitarian clergyman. Though, in a few years, he resigned

his ministerial charge, because he differed from his church and congregation in regard to the obligation of the Lord's Supper, there is a singular unanimity of opinion as to his excellence as a pastor and preacher; and this opinion seems to have been based rather on the singular beauty and sweetness of his character than on his doctrines or his eloquence. There was a celestial something in him to which his admirers gave the word "angelic." Even his theological opponents among the Unitarians admitted the exceptional purity of his conduct and behavior, while regretting his audacities of speculation. They found that nothing they said could provoke him into controversy; and as, like a sunbeam, he had glided into their sect, so, like a sunbeam, he glided out of it. The moment he felt that his position as a clergyman interfered with his mental liberty, he quietly dropped the "Reverend" before his name, and became plain Mr. Emerson. How deeply he sympathized with his church while he was its pastor, is indicated by a hymn written on the occasion of one of its anniversaries. As this is not included in either of the two volumes of his poetical works, it may here be quoted as showing the depth, sweetness, and solemnity of his religious sentiment at very near the time when his connection with the church he served was voluntarily broken off:

- "We love the venerable house
Our fathers built to God;
In heaven are kept their grateful vows,
Their dust endears the sod.
- "Here holy thoughts a light have shed
From many a radiant face,
And prayers of tender hope have spread
A perfume through the place.
- "And anxious hearts have pondered here
The mystery of life,
And prayed the Eternal Spirit clear
Their doubts and end their strife.
- "From humble tenements around
Came up the pensive train,
And in the church a blessing found,
Which filled their homes again.
- "For faith, and peace, and mighty love,
That from the Godhead flow,
Showed them the life of heaven above
Springs from the life below.

They live with God, their homes are dust;
But here their children pray,
And, in this fleeting lifetime, trust
To find the narrow way."

As far as printed memorials can aid us, Emerson's progress in his chosen direction seems not so much a growth as a leap. The publication of the little volume called "Nature" lifted the heretic Unitarian parson into a leader of a new school of thought, and New England transcendentalism dates its existence from that charming and suggestive book. Its circulation was limited; the author's share of the profits of its sale could hardly have paid his tailor's bill for three months; but it was studied as a kind of new gospel by a number of enthusiastic young students in our colleges, and its influence was ludicrously disproportioned to its circulation. At the time of its publication, it was impossible to meet educated men and women in any social circle in Boston without hearing "Nature" discussed—the elderly scholars assailing and the younger defending it; but still some four or five hundred copies of the book itself supplied the public demand. What is called "the popular mind" was not then, and has not since, been much affected by the volumes in which Emerson condensed his original thinking into the smallest possible compass; but dilutions of Emerson have made reputations by the score. His sentences have furnished texts for sermons; his paragraphs have been expanded into volumes; and open minds, representing every variety of creed, have gladly appropriated and worked out, after their own fashion, hints and impulses derived from this creedless seer and thinker. His comprehensiveness is shown by the fact that those timid readers who have an instinctive repugnance to the general drift of his teaching are still surprised by finding something in him which meets their immediate spiritual need; and gratefully taking that, they leave the heretical matter to such spirits as find inspiration and nutriment in it. It may be said that, while fragments of Emerson re-appear in almost all phases of modern thinking, he has left behind him no Emersonian.

In considering Emerson as a poet, writing in verse, the objection comes at once that his greatest poetic achievements have been in prose. The question is asked, Can you name one of his essays in which the poetic sentiment and faculty do not predominate? While his command of verse was limited to a few meters,

do you not feel that, when the fetters of rhyme are removed from the expression of his thought and feeling, the rhythm of some of his prose sentences is more essentially melodious than the best of his short, flashing, seven-syllabled couplets? Emerson himself, with a secret liking for verse and an aching desire to master its difficulties, once declared to a friend that the question whether his power lay in prose or verse was referred to Carlyle and John Stuart Mill, and they decided at once for prose. If Tyndall, an ardent admirer of Emerson's poetry, had been selected instead of Mill, probably no decision would have been rendered, for the judges would have disagreed.

Perhaps it may be asserted that the finest, loftiest, and deepest thoughts of Emerson, being poetic in essence, would naturally have found vent in some of the forms of poetic expression, for they announce spiritual facts and principles, vividly and warmly perceived, which are commonly not content with being stated, but carry with them an impulse and demand to be sung or chanted. If his piercing insight had been accompanied by a sensibility corresponding to it, he would have given us more poems and fewer essays; but there was a certain rigidity in his nature which could be made to melt and flow only when it was subjected to intense heat. Some persons were inclined to confound this rigidity with frigidity of character, and called him cold; but the difference was as great as that between iron and ice. The fire in him, which would instantly have dissipated ice into vapor, made the iron in him run molten and white-hot into the mold of his thought, when he was stirred by a great sentiment or an inspiring insight. It is admitted that he is worthy to rank among the great masters of expression; yet he was the least fluent of educated human beings. In a company of swift talkers he seemed utterly helpless, until he fixed upon the right word or phrase to embody his meaning, and then the word or phrase was like a gold coin, fresh and bright from the mint, and recognized as worth ten times as much as the small change of conversation which had been circulating so rapidly around the table, while he was mute or stammering. That wonderful compactness and condensation of statement which surprise and charm the readers of his books were due to the fact that he exerted every faculty of his mind in the act of verbal expression. A prodigal in respect to thoughts, he was still the most austere economist in the use of words. We detect this quality in his

poetry as in his prose ; but, in his poetry, it is found to be compatible with the lyric rush, the unwithholding self-abandonment to the inspiration of the muse, which commonly characterizes poets who, in their enthusiasm, have lost their self-possession and self-command.

In writing of poetry, Emerson admitted that his ideal poet never had an actual existence. The greatest poets of the world only suggested, here and there, the possible "Olympian bard" who would "sing divine ideas" on earth without any break in the continuity of his inspiration. His character would ever be on a level with his loftiest thought and aspiration, and "so to be" would be the sole inlet of "so to know." The secret of the universe such a bard would melodiously reveal ; but actual poets had only caught glimpses of it in certain happy moments when, with "a shudder of joy," they discerned the Real shining through the mask of the Apparent. The mask was visible nature ; the real was the soul within and behind it.

In regard to this all-animating soul, the idealism of Emerson varied with his moods. There are numerous passages in his works which, with a simple change of terms, would make his doctrine of the "Over-Soul" agree with the orthodoxy of Jonathan Edwards. Substitute "Holy Spirit" for "Over-Soul" in his affirmation of the communion of the divine with the human mind, and the heretic becomes almost a Calvinist. "When," Emerson says, "this soul breathes through the intellect of man, it is genius ; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue ; when it flows through his affection, it is love." The impotence of man when deprived of this divine inspiration and support has hardly ever been more strongly stated than in some of Emerson's sentences and couplets. "The blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims, in some one particular, to let the soul have its way through us ; in other words, to engage us to obey." It is needless to multiply quotations in which Emerson affirms that what is done by man is as nothing when compared with what is done through him.

This seeming conformity to the Westminster Catechism is, however, soon found to be only a part of a scheme of thought which includes some heresies. Emerson's leading idea was that the whole universe of thought and things was a complex mani-

festation of a Central Unity ; that "the All" was a manifestation of "the One"; that the universal mind was in the minutest atom of nebulous mist as in the brain of Plato or Newton ; and that man, in his highest perceptions of nature, not only communed with the soul animating the visible universe, but saw and felt that his individual soul was identical with it ; for he says : "The world is mind precipitated, and the volatile essence is ever escaping again into the state of free thought. Hence the virtue and pungency of the influence on the mind of natural objects, whether inorganic or organic. Man imprisoned, man crystalized, man vegetative, speaks to man impersonated." In the heat of developing this thought, Emerson seems at times to be a pantheist, representing the universal mind as impersonal, though coming now and then to self-consciousness in certain great individuals elected or selected to be its organs—these men, however, being but waves in the great sea of existence, elevated above other men for the moment by some wind of inspiration sweeping over its surface, but subsiding quickly to the ordinary level of the infinite ocean of being of which they form an inconsiderable portion. They emerge only to be submerged. But his opinions on this question vary with the variations in his mental and moral experience of life, and in one essay he seems to deny what he may vehemently affirm in the next. It is hopeless to search his writings for any consistent theory of deism or pantheism. Still one thing is certain, that the deity he adores, whether an Infinite Person or an Infinite It, is "immanent" in the universe of matter and mind, and stamps it with the impress of unity. In the little poem called "Blight," he complains that too many modern scientists have lost the sense that nature is alive with spirit. They look only at the surfaces of things ; and, in this respect, he contrasts them unfavorably with the old astrologers and alchemists, who at least preferred things to names :

"For these were men,
Were unitarians of the united world,
And wheresoever their clear eye-beams fell,
They caught the footsteps of the SAME."

And in "Xenophanes" he declares :

"All things
Are of one pattern made ; bird, beast, and flower,
Song, picture, form, space, thought, and character

Deceive us, seeming to be many things,
 And are but one. Beheld far off, they part
 As God and devil; bring them to the mind,
 They dull its edge with their monotony.
 To know one element, explore another,
 And in the second re-appears the first.
 The spacious panorama of a year
 But multiplies the image of a day,—
 A bell of mirrors round a taper's flame;
 And universal Nature, through her vast
 And crowded whole, an infinite paroquet,
 Repeats one note."

In "Wood-Notes" we see Emerson in his most rapturous mood. There is inspiration in every line. In direct contact with nature, he throws off every shackle of conventionality, and sings as though he were the first and only man—the Adam, born with the birth of created things, and gladly and exultingly witnessing and welcoming the creation whose secret purpose and plan he discerns.

"All the forms are fugitive,
 But the substances survive.
 Ever fresh the broad creation,
 A divine improvisation,
 From the heart of God proceeds,
 A single will, a million deeds.
 Once slept the world an egg of stone,
 And pulse, and sound, and light was none;
 And God said 'Throb!' and there was motion,
 And the vast mass became vast ocean.
 Onward and on, the eternal Pan,
 Who layeth the world's incessant plan,
 Halteth never in one shape,
 But forever doth escape,
 Like wave or flame, into new forms
 Of gem and air, of plants and worms.
 * * * * *
 The world is the ring of his spells,
 And the play of his miracles.
 As he giveth to all to drink,
 Thus and thus they are and think.
 He giveth little or giveth much,
 To make them several or such.
 With one drop sheds form and feature;
 With the second a special nature;
 The third adds heat's indulgent spark;
 The fourth gives light which eats the dark;
 Into the fifth himself he flings,
 And Conscious Law is King of Kings."

Could a pantheist have defined the Universal Being as "*Conscious Law*"? Has any believer in the personality of God ever hit upon a better definition?

Emerson, in an essay on art, declares that the artist must "disindividualize" himself, and become an organ through which the universal mind acts. "There is," he says, "but one reason. The mind that made the world is not one mind, but *the* mind. Every man is an inlet to the same, and to all of the same." The delight we take in a work of art "seems to arise from our recognizing in it the mind that formed nature again in active operation. . . . A masterpiece of art has in the mind a fixed place in the chain of being, as much as a plant or a crystal." In "The Problem," the best known of all his poems, this thought is developed with wonderful power and beauty. The founders of religions, the great poets and artists, all men who have done things which are universally admitted to be great and admirable, were "disindividualized"—the recipients of an inspiration from the "vast soul that o'er them planned," and, in all their works, "building better than they knew." It is needless to quote passages from this poem, because so many thousands of cultivated people know it by heart. But why is it called "The Problem"? The answer must be sought in the verses with which it begins and closes. Like all poets and philosophers who are classed as pantheists, Emerson had a pronounced, almost a haughty, individuality. Throughout his life he guarded this with a jealous care. He never could endure the thought of being the organ of any fraternity, the disciple of any master, the representative of any organization, the spokesman of any body of reformers, however noble might be their objects. His essays swarm with criticisms on the one-sidedness of every philanthropic association of his time; and it may be said, as an illustration of the general impression regarding the purity, integrity, strength, and sweetness of his character, that he was the only man in New England who could criticise the "reformers" without becoming the object of their invective. It was impossible for Emerson to part with his own individuality, even in celebrating the achievements of the inspired saints, bards, and artists who had seemingly parted with theirs. He did not desire to "disindividualize" himself, while intensely appreciating other individualities. "I like," he says,—

"I like a church; I like a cowl;
 I love a prophet of the soul;
 And on my heart monastic aisles
 Fall like sweet strains or pensive smiles;
 Yet not for all his faith can see
 Would I that cowlèd Churchman be."

Then burst forth the magnificent lines which seem to destroy the individual in the act of exalting him as the selected instrument of a power higher than himself; and yet the conclusion agrees with the beginning. After all, it must still, he thinks, be said that there is something which distinguishes the person who receives the celestial impulse and aid from all other persons.

"I know what say the fathers wise,—
 The book itself before me lies:
 Old *Chrysostom*, best Augustine,
 And he who blent both in his line,
 The younger *Golden Lips* or mines,
 Taylor, the Shakespeare of divines.
 His words are music to my ear,
 I see his cowlèd portrait dear;
 And yet for all his faith could see,
 I would not the good bishop be."

All this practically means: "I would not be otherwise than what I am, Ralph Waldo Emerson."

Indeed, however much Emerson may vary in his statements,—at one time placing the emphasis on the universal mind, and at another on the individual mind,—the general drift of his writings goes to show that the purpose of the spirit which underlies "Nature" is to build up intrepid manhood in human nature. In "*Monadnoc*," the poet professes to be at first disgusted with the clowns and churls who have built their habitations on the slopes of the mountain; but he finds consolation in the thought that they are the progenitors of a finer race to come.

"The World-soul knows his own affair,
 Forelooking when he would prepare,
 For the next ages, men of mould
 Well embodied, well ensouled;
 He cools the present's fiery glow,
 Sets the life-pulse strong but slow:
 Bitter winds and fasts austere
 His quarantines and grottos, where
 He slowly cures decrepit flesh,

And brings it infantile and fresh.
 These exercises are the toys
 And games to breathe his stalwart boys:
 They bide their time, and well can prove,
 If need were, their line from Jove;
 Of the same stuff, and so allayed,
 As that whereof the sun is made,
 And of the fiber, quick and strong,
 Whose throbs are love, whose thrills are song."

But what is the mental mood in which the human mind, lifted above its ordinary limitations, sees into the heart of Nature? Emerson affirms it to be the mood of ecstasy—a kind of celestial intoxication which, while it may blind the eye of the soul to the clear perception of things as they appear, sharpens and brightens its perception of things as they really are. In "Bacchus" we have both a statement and example of this inspiration. "Bring me," he exclaims,—

"Bring me wine, but wine which never grew
 In the belly of the grape,
 Or grew on vine whose tap-roots, reaching through
 Under the Andes to the Cape,
 Suffered no savor of the earth to 'scape.

* * * * *

We buy ashes for bread;
 We buy diluted wine;
 Give me of the true,—
 Whose ample leaves and tendrils curled
 Among the silver hills of heaven
 Draw everlasting dew;
 Wine of wine,
 Blood of the world,
 Form of forms, and mould of statures,
 That I intoxicated,
 And by the draught assimilated,
 May float at pleasure through all natures;
 The bird language rightly spell,
 And that which roses say so well.

"Wine that is shed
 Like the torrents of the sun
 Up the horizon walls,
 Or like the Atlantic streams which run
 When the South Sea calls.

"Water and bread,
 Food which needs no transmuting,
 Rainbow-flowering, wisdom-fruited,
 Wine which is already man,
 Food which teach and reason can.

"Wine which Music is,—
 Music and wine are one,—
 That I, drinking this,
 Shall hear far Chaos talk with me;
 Kings unborn shall walk with me;
And the poor grass shall plot and plan
What it will do when it is man.
 Quickened so, will I unlock
 Every crypt of every rock.

"I thank the joyful juice
 For all I know;
 Winds of remembering
 Of the ancient being blow,
 And seeming-solid walls of use
 Open and flow.

"Pour, Bacchus! the remembering wine;
 Retrieve the loss of me and mine!
 Vine for vine be antidote,
 And the grape requite the lote!
 Haste to cure the old despair,—
 Reason in Nature's lotus drenched,
 The memory of ages quenched;
 Give them again to shine;
 Let wine repair what this undid;
 And where the infection slid,
 A dazzling memory revive;
 Refresh the faded tints,
 Recut the aged prints,
 And write my old adventures with the pen
 Which on the first day drew,
 Upon the tablets blue,
 The dancing Pleiads and eternal men."

In this poem, published long before the "Origin of Species" appeared, we have a theory of development and evolution more far-reaching than Darwin's; and Emerson anticipates even the doctrine of natural selection, in some of his other poems. Thus, for instance, in "The World-Soul," he says that Destiny

"The patient Dæmon sits,
 With roses and a shroud;
 He has his way and deals his gifts,—
 But ours are not allowed.

* * * *

He serveth the servant,
 The brave he loves amain;
 He kills the cripple and the sick,
 And straight begins again.

For gods delight in gods,
And thrust the weak aside;
To him who scorns their charities,
Their arms fly open wide."

And, again, in the "Ode to W. H. Channing," we have this declaration:

"The over-god
Who marries Right to Might,
Who peoples, unpeoples,—
He who exterminates
Races by stronger races,
Black by white faces,—
Knows how to bring honey
Out of the lion;
Grafts gentlest scion
On pirate and Turk."

The general idea of the "survival of the fittest" re-appears often in Emerson's writings. To benevolent men it seems the scientific form of the theological doctrine of "election"; but Emerson considered it in connection with his theory that what we call evil is a roundabout way of producing good. The spiritual laws which regulate the universe cannot be overturned by powerful individuals, for it is notorious that what they desire to do in violation of these outlying laws meets with such resistance that the effect produced is very different from the effect intended. Evil is good in the making, not a positive substance, but a mere imperfection of good. "The sharpest evils are bent into that periodicity which makes the errors of planets and the fevers and distempers of men self-limiting." "Good is a good doctor, but Bad is sometimes a better." "If one shall read the future of the race hinted in the organic effort of Nature to mount and meliorate, and the corresponding impulse to the Better in the human being, we shall dare affirm that there is nothing he will not overcome and convert, until at last culture shall absorb the chaos and gehenna. He will convert the Furies into Muses, and the hells into benefit."

It is in view of such sentences as these that we must consider a few of Emerson's poems in which his theory of evil is somewhat too bluntly expressed. Such is "Uriel," which has troubled many of Emerson's admirers who were attracted to him because of the emphasis he laid on the moral sentiment. It was the very intensity of his conception of the universal dominion of this sentiment which made him deride all efforts to resist it.

Leaving out of view, however, Emerson's poetic philosophy of nature and man, and the poems which specially represent it, he is still the author of some short pieces which are at once admirable and popular. Such are "Each and All," "The Rhodora," "The Snow-storm," "The Humble-bee," and "Forerunners," each of which justifies the dictum of their author, that "Beauty is its own excuse for being." In "Forerunners," the poet tells us of his joyous and resolute pursuit of unattainable beauty. The pursuit of his "happy guides" results in disappointment, —

"For no speed of mine avails
To hunt upon their shining trails";

yet, though never overtaken, he feels they are never far distant.

"Their near camp my spirit knows
By signs gracious as rainbows.
I thenceforward, and long after,
Listen for their harp-like laughter,
And carry in my heart for days
Peace that hallows rudest ways."

It is a marked distinction of this little poem, one of the most exquisite in the language, that it testifies to the possibility of finding a certain content in following continually an ideal never reached. Most poets eloquently celebrate their discontent when they learn that the earth they inhabit is different from the heaven they conceive. Byron is specially enraged at what he considers this injustice of Providence.

Emerson's philosophy in this matter was not due to a dull perception of beauty in any of its forms. No poet was more keenly susceptible to it; no poet ever shrank from deformity with such an instinctive repulsion; and moral ugliness specially irritated him, not only because it was wicked, but because it was "disagreeable." Goethe's masterpiece, *Faust*, "abounded," he once wrote, "in the disagreeable. The vice is prurient, learned, Parisian. In the presence of Jove, Priapus may be allowed as an offset, but here he is an equal hero. The book is undoubtedly written by a master, and stands unhappily related to the whole modern world; but it is a very disagreeable chapter of literature, and accuses the author as well as the times. Shakespeare could, no doubt, have been disagreeable had he less genius, and if ugliness had attracted him. In short, our English nature and genius has made us the worst critics of Goethe."

Indeed, Emerson felt in this matter like his own humble-bee, in his avoidance of "aught unsavory or unclean." And his "Ode to Beauty" indicates that the sense of beauty penetrated to the inmost center of his being, and was an indissoluble element in his character.

"Who gave thee, O Beauty,
The keys of this breast,—
Too credulous lover
Of blest and unblest,—
Say, when in lapsed ages
Thee knew I of old?
Or what was the service
For which I was sold?
I found me thy thrall
By magical drawings,
Sweet tyrant of all!

* * * * *

Lavish, lavish promiser,
Nigh persuading gods to err!
Guest of million painted forms,
Which in turn thy glory warms!
The frailest leaf, the mossy bark,
The acorn's cup, the rain-drop's arc,
The swinging spider's silver line,
The ruby of the drop of wine,
The shining pebble of the pond,
Thou inscribest with a bond,
In thy momentary play,
Would bankrupt nature to repay.

* * * * *

Thee, gliding through the sea of form,
Like the lightning through the storm,
Somewhat not to be possessed,
Somewhat not to be caressed,
No feet so fleet could ever find,
No perfect form could ever bind.

* * * * *

The leafy dell, the city mart,
Equal trophies of thine art;
E'en the flowing azure air
Thou hast touched for my despair;
And, if I languish into dreams,
Again I meet the ardent beams.
Queen of things! I dare not die
In Being's deeps past ear and eye;
Lest there I find the same deceiver,
And be the sport of Fate forever.
Dread Power, but dear! if God thou be,
Unmake me quite, or give thyself to me!"

Emerson once, in speaking to a friend, remarked that he could write in prose by spurring his faculties into action, but he could write in verse only in certain happy moments of inspiration, for which he had to wait. In our limited space it is impossible to do more than to quote a few verses in which this inspiration is recorded. Here are specimens from "Wood-Notes":

"For Nature beats in perfect tune,
And rounds with rhyme her every rune,
Whether she work in land or sea,
Or hide underground her alchemy,
Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,
Or dip thy paddle in the lake,
But it carves the bow of beauty there,
And the ripples in rhyme the oar forsake.

* * * * *

Who liveth by the ragged pine
Foundeth a heroic line;
Who liveth in a palace hall
Waneth fast and spendeth all.

* * * * *

The rough and bearded forester
Is better than the lord;
God fills the scrip and canister,
Sin piles the loaded board.

* * * * *

Go where he will, the wise man is at home,
His hearth the earth,—his hall the azure dome.

* * * * *

He saw beneath dim aisles, in odorous beds,
The slight Linnæa hang its twin-born heads,
And blessed the monument of the man of flowers,
Which breathes his sweet fame through the northern bowers.

* * * * *

Lover of all things alive,
Wonderer at all he meets,
Wonderer chiefly at himself,—
Who can tell him what he is?
Or how meet in human elf
Coming and past eternities?"

From his poems under the title of "Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love," lines without number might be cited in proof that he had studied this passion scientifically. His report on its various manifestations has the exactness of the scientist combined with the glow of the poet. His Cupid is represented as especially dangerous through his eyes.

" In the pit of his eye's a spark
 Would bring back day if it were dark

* * * * *

He lives in his eyes;
 There doth digest, and work and spin,
 And buy and sell, and lose and win;
 He rolls them with delighted motion,
 Joy-tides swell their mimic ocean.
 Yet holds he them with taughtest rein,
 That they may seize and entertain
 The glance that to their glance opposes,
 Like fiery honey sucked from roses.

* * * * *

Deep, deep are loving eyes,
 Flowed with naphtha fiery sweet;
 And the point is paradise
 Where their glances meet."

Emerson has two poems, "Dirge" and "Threnody," which stand for examples of what may be called intellectualized pathos. The grief does not burst forth with passionate directness from the heart, but is passed through the intellect and imagination before it is allowed expression in words. Tennyson's "In Memoriam" is the most striking illustration in English literature of this process of restraining emotion in order to make its finer effects on character permanent. The poet lays particular emphasis on the office of imagination in softening and consecrating the grief which it at the same time makes enduring.

" Likewise the imaginative woe,
 That loved to handle spiritual strife,
 Diffused the shock through all my life,
 But in the present broke the blow."

In Emerson's "Dirge" this spiritualized sadness is exquisitely expressed. His dead brothers are still kept sacredly near to his soul, for they are lodged in the memory of his realizing imagination, and no lapse of years can make the sense of his loss of "the strong, star-bright companions" of his childhood and youth a calamity to fade into forgetfulness. In essential pathos, what can exceed the sorrow expressed in this stanza of the poem:

" I touch this flower of silken leaf,
 Which once our childhood knew,
 Its soft leaves wound me with a grief
 Whose balsam never grew."

The "Threnody" on the loss of his child—

"The hyacinthine boy, for whom
Morn well might break and April bloom,
The gracious boy, who did adorn
The world whereinto he was born"—

has more of the character of an outburst of the heart under the agonizing feeling of an irreparable calamity, but its pathos is still of the kind which lies "too deep for tears." Indeed, the solid manhood of the father, rooted in ideas, and strong to resist the "blasphemy of grief," was never better exemplified than in this tender and beautiful "Threnody." The father has now followed the child. Is it irreverent to suggest that the anticipation in the line which concludes the poem he has now verified?—

"Lost in God, in Godhead found."

There are stanzas in Emerson's poems which read like oracles. Their truth to our moral being is so close that we should hardly be surprised if they were prefaced with a "Thus saith the Lord." And, indeed, Emerson announces them with the confident tone of the seer and the prophet. They rank with the loftiest utterances which have ever proceeded from the awakened heart and conscience and intellect of man. The Concord Fourth of July "Ode" (1857), which opens with the magnificent imagination,

"O tenderly the haughty Day
Fills his blue urn with fire,"

closes with the inspiring declaration that

"He that worketh high and wise,
Nor pauses in his plan,
Will take the sun out of the skies
Ere freedom out of man."

The short poem called "Freedom" ends with these soul-animating lines:

"Freedom's secret wilt thou know?
Counsel not with flesh and blood;
Loiter not for cloak or food;
Right thou feelest, rush to do."

The "Boston Hymn" (1863), which begins with "the Word of the Lord," closes with an impressive verse in which is condensed

the whole divine law of retribution. What poet before Emerson ever gave eyes to the thunderbolt?

"My will fulfilled shall be,
For, in daylight as in dark,
My thunderbolt has eyes to see
His way home to the mark."

In the "Voluntaries," which are infused throughout with the heroic feelings roused by the civil war, there is one quatrain that stands out from the rest with startling distinctness and power:

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,
The youth replies, *I can*."

But perhaps the noblest of these affirmations of the absolute obligation of men to follow their consciences, rather than what appears to be their interests, is contained in four lines with the heading of "Sacrifice." This quatrain is a poem in itself,—an epic poem:

"Though love repine, and reason chafe,
There comes a voice without reply,—
'Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die."

The reason that such grand utterances as these thrill us with unwonted emotion is to be found in our instinctive belief that the poet's character was on a level with his lofty thinking. He affirmed the supremacy of spiritual laws because he spoke from a height of spiritual experience to which he had mounted by the steps of spiritual growth. In reading him, we feel that we are in communion with an original person, as well as with an original poet,—one whose character is as brave as it is sweet, as strong as it is beautiful, as firm and resolute in will as it is keen and delicate in insight,—one who has earned the right to authoritatively announce, without argument, great spiritual facts and principles, because his soul has come into direct contact with them. As a poet he often takes strange liberties with the established laws of rhyme and rhythm; even his images are occasionally enigmas; but he still contrives to pour through his verse a flood and rush of inspiration not often perceptible in the axiomatic sentences of his most splendid prose. In his verse he gives

free, joyous, exulting expression to all the audacities of his thinking and feeling; and perhaps this inadequate attempt to set forth his merits as a poet may be appropriately closed by citing, from the poem which bears the title of "Merlin," his own conception of what a poet should be and should do:

"Thy trivial harp will never please
 Or fill my craving ear;
 Its chords should ring as blows the breeze,
 Free, peremptory, clear.
 No jingling serenader's art,
 Nor tinkle of piano strings,
 Can make the wild blood start
 In its mystic springs.
 The kingly bard
 Must smite the chords rudely and hard,
 As with hammer or with mace;
 That they may render back
 Artful thunder, which conveys
 Secrets of the solar track,
 Sparks of the supersolar blaze.
 Merlin's blows are strokes of fate,
 Chiming with the forest tone,
 When boughs buffet boughs in the wood;
 Chiming with the gasp and moan
 Of the ice-imprisoned flood;
 With the pulse of many hearts;
 With the voice of orators;
 With the din of city arts;
 With the cannonade of wars;
 With the marches of the brave;
 And prayers of might from martyr's cave.

"Great is the art,
 Great be the manners, of the bard.
 He shall not his brain encumber
 With the coil of rhythm and number;
 But, leaving rule and pale forethought,
 He shall aye climb
 For his rhyme.
 'Pass in, pass in,' the angels say,
 'In to the upper doors,
 Nor count compartments of the floors,
 But mount to Paradise
 By the stairway of surprise.'"

EDWIN P. WHIPPLE.